



# Special Authority Speeds Hiring in Acquisition Career Fields

*Ed Worley*

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any federal government employers would agree that hiring a civilian employee off the street is challenging. Hiring managers agree that the standard recruitment and hiring systems aren't the quickest way to increase an organization's talent pool. The process averages about 120 days—that is, unless the candidate is being hired under the Expedited Hiring Authority.

"EHA has made it possible for us to reach into a talent resource that would have been very difficult for us to penetrate without it," said Jeff Parsons, Army Contracting Command executive director. "It gives us the ability to compete for and quickly hire highly qualified contracting specialists from the private sector. It's a great asset for us as we work to develop a professional contracting workforce to support our warfighters."

The Department of Defense delegated authority and responsibility for the use of EHA in 2008. It allows the military departments to "appoint highly qualified individuals to shortage category positions in the career fields ... identified," according to a joint memorandum signed by the under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, and the under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

The memorandum identified 12 career fields:

- Auditing
- Business, cost estimating, and financial management
- Contracting
- Facilities engineering
- Information technology
- Life cycle logistics
- Production, quality, and manufacturing
- Program management
- Quality control and assurance
- Science and technology management
- Systems planning, research, development, engineering, and testing
- Test and evaluation

ACC's hiring managers have been putting the EHA to good use. The result, so far, is 196 new acquisition personnel hired by the command. At

Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) Contracting Center, Rock Island, Ill., Sally Turke said that EHA has helped the contracting center remain functional as its operations transition under the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) Commission-required move to the contracting center's Warren, Mich., headquarters.

"It kept us functioning longer because we were able to bring employees in at a higher grade," explained Turke, chief, TACOM Contracting Center's contract support division. "And because we were able to bring them in at a higher grade, they stayed with us longer before they began to look for other positions [as a result of the center's relocation to Warren]. We

picked up one guy who had 13 years of contracting experience in the private sector."

Turke said some of the new hires, while not making the move to Michigan, are being hired "down the street" by ACC's Rock Island Contracting Center. She singled out a 2009 hiring campaign as her biggest success to date.

"We issued the [request for personnel action] on May 22, and had them all on board by July 27." She hired nine nongovernment employees in that period, and all are still working for the U.S. Army. "It was a very successful class for us," Turke said.

Farther north at TACOM Contracting Center's headquarters, Kimberlee Menzel has also been successful hiring nongovernmental employees. TACOM

participated in the state's 2009 "Michigan Jobs for Michigan People" job fair, resulting in the hiring of 12 new employees. The organization was able to hire information technology journeymen, contract specialists, contract cost/price analysts, industrial cost/price analysts, and procurement and production specialists. Of the 12 hired from the 2009 job fair, nine are still with the contracting center.

"EHA has helped us retain people across the TACOM Contracting Center during this time of BRAC mission transfer," Menzel said, referring to the authority to bring people on board at journeyman levels. "We've kept them longer than if we had brought them on board at the GS-5 or GS-7 level because they see that we recognize

the value of their experience in the private sector."

Valerie Ward, ACC's corporate recruitment program manager, says the EHA reduces the amount of time spent on the front end of the hiring process.

"Under the standard system, a job is posted on the Web for a period of time, then the system kicks out a candidate list. It's filtered by personnel, based on the critical skills listed in the announcement; then a list is sent to the hiring manager for consideration, interviews, and selection. With EHA, the manager can decide to use some, none, or all of the standard process," Ward said. Once selected, a prospect's credentials

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**—Jeff Parsons, Army Contracting Command Executive Director**



and education are validated and the candidate receives a tentative offer.

"Using the EHA, it's possible for a hiring manager to go to a job fair, collect résumés, review credentials, select a candidate, and make a tentative offer on the spot," said Ward. She added that the Missile Defense Agency, her former organization, used the EHA to hire more than 30 candidates on the spot at a job fair.

If required by the position, candidates still have to go through the standard security clearance and drug testing processes. Those haven't been expedited, she explained.

Ward said it also gives ACC the flexibility to bring in people who wouldn't normally be classified eligible for the selection list under the standard process because they don't have status, e.g., current or former government employees. EHA positions are open to all U.S. citizens.

The National Capital Region Contracting Center in Alexandria, Va., has also been successful using the EHA to increase its staff, according to Steve Carrano, the center's deputy director.

"With the traditional program we tended to get people who were already government employees," he explained. With EHA, he said, the lists were "significantly different."

The NCRCC used an open continuous vacancy announcement through a pilot project with Rock Island Arsenal, Ill. The longest it took to receive qualified applicant names was about 3 days, Carrano said.

"The time saved on the front end was enormous—2 to 4 months. The Rock Island people did a good job of confirming applicants' credentials before they were put on the list. We could farm those names out to managers and supervisors on a weekly basis and say, 'Do any of these people interest you?'" Carrano said.

To date, ACC has used the EHA to hire mostly contract specialists—70 percent of the command's workforce—but the command's goal is to expand EHA's use. Ward hopes to establish a corporate recruiting plan that incorporates all centers. Part of that plan includes using EHA to include all relevant career fields authorized by the Department of Defense.

"EHA is a wonderful authority," Ward said. "If we use it the way it was intended, we will strengthen the acquisition workforce and give the oversight the DoD is looking for. It allows us to bring in the workforce to save taxpayers' money."

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